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Tuesday - October 21, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

INFORMATION

FROM: Henry Kissinger

SUBJECT: Coup in Somalia

Elements of the Somali Army and police seized power early this morning from Prime Minister Egal's elected government. First reports are very sketchy. The following is the sum of our intelligence up to the moment

- The coup followed immediately upon a reported split in Egal's governing party over the nomination of a successor for assassinated President Shermarke.
- But there is no evidence that the Army acted on behalf of, or in specific opposition to, either of the factions in Egal's party. Egal's whereabouts are unknown and the Somali radio has announced simply that the country will be governed by "military council".
- Nor is there evidence that the coup is related to the earlier assassination. The only radio broadcast so far by the new regime referred to general corruption and cited the assassination as an example of the breakdown of the civilian government.
- The initial broadcast says the new regime will respect all foreign policy obligations, but also pledges aid to "freedom fighters", which almost certainly is a reversal of Egal's detente with Ethiopia over disputed border territories.
- Thus far the coup has been bloodless. Our Embassy reports all Americans safe. Our Ambassador is meeting with other members of the diplomatic corps this afternoon to hear a formal statement from a spokesman of the new government.

Implications for US Interests

Judgments at this point are clearly premature, but my own guess is that this is yet another group of young officers who will remain quietly in the background. They were probably moved in part by disagreement with Egal's policy of detente, in part by resentment of the inevitable corruption and inefficiency of African democracies (even in a model government like Somalia's). The assassination and then the apparent disarray among Egal's

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followers over the succession offered a rare opportunity.

For the US, of course, the most important element will be the survival or the collapse of the detente. If the Somalis returned to bellicose irredentism (as these first signs seem to suggest), tension will rise throughout the area, including Kenya as well as Ethiopia. The old arms supply spiral could then begin again -- with the Somalis going to the Soviets, the Ethiopians to us, the Kenyans to the British.

Having tried detente and failed, Haile Selassie will probably find it impossible to hold his own hard-liners in check. And if the two sides slip back into belligerence, we should expect the Ethiopians to put our interests on the line -- the important communications facility at Kagnaw -- in asking for increased military assistance. As the Somalis modernize their arms, and as Ethiopia diverts more of our help and their own resources to weapons rather than economic development, the only real beneficiary is the Soviets.

I will have a further situation report for you as soon as we have more details.

RMorris:mmm